

Running to a Conclusion

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY ENSEMBLE.....	3
BEGINNING THE SEARCH.....	4
RUNNING TO A CONCLUSION.....	6
RUNNING: FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOOD.....	7
YOU'RE RUNNING.. <i>HOW</i> LONG?.....	12
TO SHOE OR NOT TO SHOE?.....	18
TODAY IS YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW—WILL RUNNING BE POPULAR ON <i>TODAY'S</i> TOMORROW?.....	21
CONCLUDING THE WORK.....	23
THE RESULTANT.....	23
CONCLUDING THE CONCLUSION.....	24
WORKS CITED.....	25
IMAGES CITED.....	27

INTRODUCTORY ENSEMBLE

“In Kenya, I did see kids running to school...just like the stories. Can you imagine an American grade-schooler running 5 to 6 miles to school? Then, when they get home, helping in the fields, playing hard outside with friends—say, a pick up soccer game—[and] walking or running to the store? By the time they get to “training”, they are thousands of miles ahead of a child living in our society” (Beverly).



“Hey, want to go for a quick 5-mile with me?”

“..You mean, a run.?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you insane?”

“Yeah.”

Unfortunately, that response is elicited quite commonly when it comes to running: are you insane? The world has moved on, times have changed, and there are choices like *cars* that do the heavy lifting for us now; there are easier, less intense means of acquiring the same outcome running used to present with us: travel, food, protection. In fact, a very select few groups still practice the art as it was, unaffected by our current, fast-paced society. These (some say lucky, some say outdated) groups preside primarily in the depths of the untainted world—the world in which history still lives. The Tarahumara of Northern Mexico, the Kenyans of East Africa, and the Marathon Monks of Japan create a vast representation of this dying breed. Although societal influences push away from the traditional ties of running, these three groups have learned to preserve this culture through enforcing its natural ways of primitive living.

BEGINNING THE SEARCH

So.

Where to begin, where to begin?

Ah yes: the beginning.



As with any research, mine began with questions:

“Does everyone, the world over, simply just run for fun now (or at least to get in shape)? Are there no more *needs* associated with running— simply the mere sport of it? How has running evolved from what it began as to what it is now? And what did it begin as?”

With these questions, coupled with my already immense love for running, I was off. Initially, I struggled with creating a steady platform on which to base my studies: I knew what I wanted to research, but didn't know how to connect everything and where to draw the line of “too much—distracting” regarding the information the reader (that's

you) received; I had too much interest in too many categorical divides of running hindered by too little time. It wasn't until midway through my research that I finally cemented my route on the evolving nature of running and the consequences of such an evolution.

In lieu of such uncertainties concerning my studies, I began treading lightly in my search: articles of general running history, of cultures that still practice the ancient hunting styles, of what these “ancient hunts” consisted of compiled into the platform on which I based my agenda. Also, this informative eclipse taunted me with the information that I had yet to find; the questions swarmed again.

I began with the only way I knew how: annotating (yes, I did learn something useful from my seemingly endless years of English classes). Said articles were allocated, were scripted onto printer paper,

yet brimful of useful insights. I do, however, feel as though my initial knowledge of running did play an important role in allowing the development to flow as smoothly as it did. I did not know much, but I knew some: I knew how to run, I knew that many people do not enjoy running (I am not one of these common-folk), and I knew that big game hunting was once a sport conducted barefoot, with only a knife, some friends, and a handful of hours spent in pursuit of food.

I knew some, but I learned more.

May I present to you, my learned evolution of running:



RUNNING TO A CONCLUSION

A brief note to the reader,

I have written this piece with you in mind. I have contorted my findings into a fragile framework of data in the most colloquial form possible. In doing so, I expect you to have no previous knowledge regarding this topic—other than, perhaps, an erstwhile run under your belt. If complications of understanding seemed to have sprouted, I knocked down the weeds with a simple spray of explanation. I intend to teach—not taunt.

Here goes.



∞ RUNNING: FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOOD

“Most of the runners I’ve run alongside have been modern competitive runners; groups like the Tarahumara are quite rare in the world anymore...People generally walk, not run, for transportation” (Beverly). Only a select few regions still focus on running as it was, untainted by society; once such zone of relaxed societal influence occurs in the mountains of northern Mexico—home to the Tarahumara.



The Tarahumara are quiet people. Their residence, in the Copper Canyons of the Sierra Mountain Range, just west of Chihuahua, Mexico, was once riddled with inquisitive conquistadors. Instead of making



The Copper Canyon of Northern Mexico—home to the Tarahumara.

a stand against these intruders and their violent spread of smallpox, the Tarahumara “chose to run and hide between the sheer cliffs in the Copper Canyon, and have pretty much been there ever since” (Wright). This fleeting nature eventually crafted a super human breed: their abilities are staggering. Several members to this incredible running culture—a culture whose name, Tarahumara, actually means “running people”—have been known to run over 400 miles in two days: *sixteen times further than a marathon* (MemeScyth).

Interestingly, the diet of such profound runners is profound itself: main

sustenance derives from *tesguino*—a home-brewed corn beer—beans, corn, and livestock milk ("The Tarahumara"). This being said, the Tarahumara can drink just about as well as they can run and will spend about a third of their lives under the influence of this beverage's alcoholic effects (MemeScyth). However, could this habitual binge actually be a secret to their successful performances? Tesguino is extremely low in alcohol—as in, it would take about four liters of the corn beer compared to a measly liter and a half of our traditional beer to get intoxicated (MemeScyth). Also, in drinking such a vast amount, the Tarahumara are drastically increasing the quantities of water and glycogen in their bodies. Tesguino is produced in large quantities, as it is consumed at a staggering rate among the Tarahumara.

Glycogen is the main byproduct of the breakdown of carbohydrates—in other words, it's what carbs are stored as. Runners need energy; runners need carbs; runners need glycogen; thus, tesguino gives the Tarahumara runner just what they need: energy.



Another interesting diet enhancement the Tarahumara concern themselves with is *Iskiate*. This “protein drink” of sorts has been around for centuries. Packed with protein, iron, zinc,



antioxidants, and an influential amount of omega-3s, this concoction utilizes the metabolism and energy boost chia seeds provide (“Power of our Iskiate Energy Drink”); the Tarahumara have made great use of its powers and never leave for a run without it. Out in the Copper Canyon, the difference between life and death could be as small as a sip.

One would think that with such a diet conducive to running that these Running People would have footwear to match. This is not the case. There are no Nike free runs, no pronation-correction, no extra-comfort shoes for these runners. Their shoes, *huaraches*,



consist of two components: a leather string, and a deer leather sole. The string is then thread through the sole on either side of the heel and in between the first and second toe ("Huarache"). No support is comforted, simply protection from the razor-sharp rocks. How can runners wearing nothing but a flat sole run *hundreds* of

miles without injury? More on this later.

Most impressively, the Tarahumara are known not for their fancy energy drinks or stylish footwear, but for what the tribe does with them: they hunt. A Chinese proverb states, "Persistence can grind an iron beam down into a needle." Well, persistence can also bring a fully grown White Tailed deer down to its demise—without assistance from bow and arrow. No, magic is not involved. This art of

weaponless hunting is referred to as persistence hunting and is thought to have been the earliest form of human hunting, evolving 2 million years ago (Persistence Hunting). It has been practiced by the Tarahumara—as well as a select few other distinguished groups, including the Kenyans and Kalahari Bushmen—for centuries. Here's the rundown of the process:



1. It is **high noon**, the hottest part of the day. The hunter—or more commonly, the *small group* of hunters—locate their **prey**; the choice is imperative: heavy, large in frame.
2. With the signal, the cluster, before unseen—**now a threat**—startles the prey into **full-fledged flight**. The decided leader takes the charge head on, while the remaining troop follows shortly behind.
3. The prey, full of short, **super-human bursts of speed**, quickly loses sight and fear of its hunters. It finds a shaded area to collect itself and regain its energy. However, the leader of the charge is **tracking the animal** from close behind.

Miles are minutes—fewer of each mean fewer time until **dine**.
4. **Scrapes** of dirt, **tuffs** of hair, **overturned** rocks. The hunter notices them all in stride and follows their signs. Finally, the animal is in sight. The hunter once again spooks the prey into flee and **the chase resumes**. Except now, the leader slows and waits for the pack of others to catch up. It is a different hunter's turn to lead.
5. This process is repeated until the **prey collapses midstride**. It is dead before it's body hits the ground; the prey has **run itself to death**.
6. The hunters gather, **ensure death** with a knife's piercing of the prey's heart, and thank the beast for its **nourishment**. The animal is field dressed, sorted into packs, and carried the long run home to the village.
7. **Eat.**

In all, these hunts can last anywhere from an hour to five hours and usually covers 16 to 22 miles—it all depends on the heat of the day and the animal’s will to live (Persistence Hunting). Sometimes, the hunters will carry bow and arrow or spear to prematurely end the animals flight from death, inducing less suffering. But how does all this work? How can an animal simply run itself to an exhaustive death? Science.

The science behind the method is this: humans are one of the few mammals (coupled with horses) that can sweat efficiently enough to maintain body temperature; most other mammals—like deer—must pant in order to remove excess body heat and cool down. However, panting cannot be prompted at a full speed flee—the only speed known to most other quadruped, grazing, mammals: the targets of persistence hunting. Instead, these mammals must slow to at least a trot, in order to regulate core temperature, something they are not programmed to do while being chased. Thus, the constant startling, chase, brief rest, reenacted startle, resumed chase, and so on, coupled with the 100 degree temperatures, rough terrain, and the sweaty abilities of the hunters, results in an overheated deer, system failure, and death midstride (Stipp). Humans are simply the “coolest” mammals.



However, not all tribes of great runners run for such morbid reasons.

Enter Kenyans and Marathon Monks, stage left.



∞ YOU'RE RUNNING..HOW LONG?

“There are few remaining...cultures in which running is life, deeply ingrained in the minds and hearts of natives and impossible to imagine what it would be like otherwise” (Wright).

Simply put:

cultures based on running don't run to kill anymore,

they run for self-enjoyment; they run for self-fulfillment.

Very few still practice persistence hunts due to many villages being invaded by prepackaged food and city jobs (Wright). However, those societies that do still place a persuasive force on running find means other than hunting to incorporate the act into daily life.

Example one: the Kenyans.



Announcer: Here they come, folks: the top pack of runners. They just hit the 26 mile mark—two tenths of a mile left to go. They're definitely increasing their stride lengths now, letting out their full potential. What do we have he—look! The Kenyans are breaking away! Look at them go!

Crowd: Ahhhh! Yeah!

Announcer: *I don't believe it! The three-man Kenyan team has broken away from the rest of the top group! They're at world record pace folks, with just one tenth of a mile left! Look at them go!*

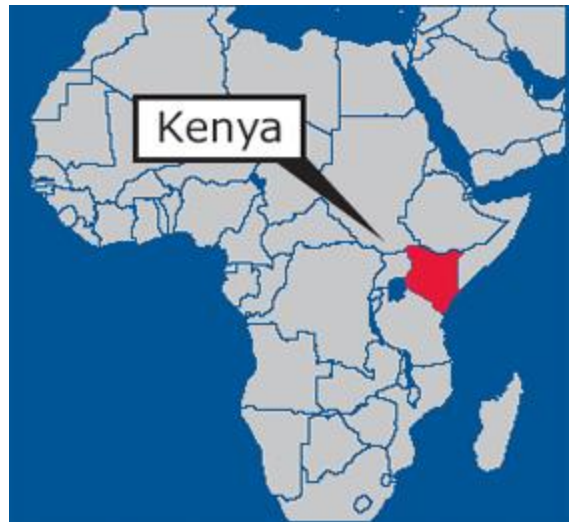
Crowd: *AHHH! YEAH!*

Announcer: *They're still going! Man, do they have a lead! The strength of these men! They don't even look tired! Just a few more steps! Still world record pace, folks! Look at them go!*

Crowd: *(Deafening screams.)*

Announcer: *They've done it!*

As Ricky Williams once surmised, “I think it’s very easy for people to stereotype athletes, good and bad.” Well, Ricky, this is very true—especially when it comes to Kenyans. “First place” and “Kenyan” are two terms not unfamiliar with each other. When one envisions a Kenyan, it usually amounts to a man at the head of a race pack of runners, lightly swooping over the finish line ahead of the other exhausted finishers, leg strides lengthy, focus strong. But why is this? Why are Kenyans strung with such an association?



The secret may lie within the lifestyle Kenyans lead: entirely un-American. It is not uncommon to find a pack of runners headed to the village center to purchase food for the next few days—not in the back of a pickup, but on foot. A main form of transportation for these men and woman *is running*. If Americans were put into a situation as such, where running was one of

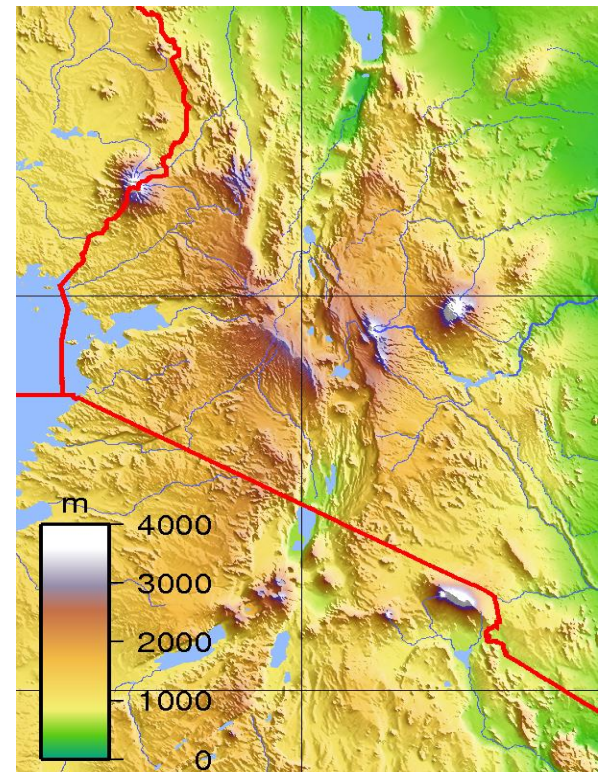
the main forms of travel, our society would crumble. As Jonathan Beverly, editor in chief of "Running Times" magazine, states, "I think the biggest difference [between Americans and Kenyans] is how much aerobic activity a person gets, particularly growing up" (Beverly). In America, only 49 minutes [of moderate activity] per weekday, and 35 minutes per weekend" (Bock). Compared to the average Kenyan adolescent, "running 5 to 6 miles to school," "helping in the fields, playing hard outside with friends—say, a pick up soccer game—[and] walking or running to the store" daily, Americans—and many other countries'—children are thousands of miles behind (Beverly).

“You have to know how to be bored to be a good distance runner, how to focus on one thing for a long time”

(Beverly).

But wait—there's more.

“An agrarian society...especially one formed at high altitude, [a society in which Kenyans live,] is running's most fecund soil” (Reavis). In other words, not only is the Kenyan's upbringing influential, but the location of such plays a major factor as well. Most of the world-record runners come from the sunny highlands of Central Kenya's Great Rift Valley; with an elevation of 7,000 feet above sea level—6,859 feet higher than the course of the Boston Marathon—the low oxygen levels birth incredible lung capabilities (Fisher). Not coincidentally, some say, this geographical area is also believed to be the birthplace of *Homo sapiens*.



This map shows the elevation of a portion of Kenya, Africa. The Great Rift Valley is located at the center of this image, and is comprised of the dark purple and light blue-white areas.

Keep waiting: more ahead.

“Two separate, European-led studies in a small region in western Kenya...found that young men there could, with only a few months training, reliably outperform some of the West’s best professional runners. In other words, they appeared to have a physical advantage that is common to their community” (Fisher). Shocking, right? Most say no. With their noticeable difference in body makeup, consisting of longer legs, shorter torsos, more slender limbs, and less mass for their height, many researchers refer to these ultra-runners as “bird-like” (Fisher). Interestingly, every single one of these traits aids in distance running; “There’s always a body structure,” Boys and Girls Distance Track Coach, Chris Bailey, remarks, “Sometimes you can look at a person and say, ‘They’re a distance runner.’ You take tall, lean, skinny, and you automatically think of a distance runner...It doesn’t always work out that way, but let’s face it: if you’re running a three-mile race, the less you’re carrying around in terms of your body weight—the lighter you are—the more efficient you’re going to be” (Bailey). These runners have *everything* going for them it seems.

But not all run to race, others run to reflect.

Example two: the Marathon Monks.



Normally one does not associate monks with marathons and marathons with monks. However, not everything is normal. Deep in the ravines of Mount Hiei, near Honshū, Shiga Prefecture, Japan, lives a colony of monks—“marathon monks” (“Mount Hiei”). Instead of seeking betterment of body, these men seek betterment of soul: they pursue enlightenment to realize their full potential on Earth through coming as close to death as possible to better appreciate life (Pictures).



Honshū, Shiga Prefecture, Japan—home to the Marathon Monks.

“Some can hear ash

falling

from an incense stick

after their journey is

complete” (Pictures).

The process is conducted as such: a typical day begins hours before dawn, with a light, daily meal of rice and noodles. After breakfast (which is also lunch—and dinner) and prayer, the



A view from the top of Mount Hiei.

monks prepare for their travels: a light robe is worn, tied at the waist, a knife is tucked in the rope belt, hand-made straw sandals are adorned—a pair on the feet, a pair over the shoulder for when the first pair fails; now the monk is ready. The path is familiar

to him. He has ran the same route for the

past...as long as he can remember—and *will* run until his 100-day mark of training is met.

A short time to recuperate is administered thereafter, and then the process is repeated until seven



years of training has forgone. This route encompasses the circumference of Mount Hiei, surmounting to about 50 miles of uneven, mountainous, death-laden paths. Daily. The monk does take breaks to walk, to mutter incantations, to perform rituals; but he never stops. If he finds that he cannot

complete this daily journey, his belt becomes a noose and his knife a weapon of disembowelment. Because of such repercussions, many have run with broken legs, scrapes and cuts from wild boar attacks, snake bites, and similar infortunes in order to breach the awe-inspiring stage of

kaihōgyō: the title of completion of seven years (Pictures).

Five years into the training—finally, reprieve. A break. However, this break is one that will challenge the monk more than his

daily runs, and the dangers he faces on such. This break—this break is special. Called *daleri*, the monk is given *nine days* to rest *without food and water*. This time is time to pray—to see how close to death he can venture without actually crossing over. Two other monks must sit on either side of

the journeyer in order to keep his body erect and awake. Shifts are taken for *nine days*. If this is completed, training as before is carried out for an additional two years. At this point in time, the monk has graduated to the most influential stage of enlightenment perceivable and is worshiped as an inspiration and a celebrity by the nation (Pictures).

Not surprisingly, only forty-six men have completed this journey *ever*. Many marathon runners have casually ventured to join these monks in training—in order to seek some sort of inspiration themselves—but none have lasted longer than a week.

Training is as training does, and for these divine men—training is *intense*.



∞ TO SHOE OR NOT TO SHOE?

To shoe or not to shoe, that is the question for, as Dr. Mercer Rang retorts, “Shoes do no more for the foot than a hat does for the brain” (McDougall). But what is it that shoes *do* that creates such a powerful addiction that many Americans are troubled with?

For one, they’re cool. What outfit wouldn’t be complete with a pair of stylish Nikes or Sperry’s to “bottom off” the get-up? Exactly. There aren’t many.

Also, for the more obvious reason, shoes provide protection. It’s raining: shoes keep our feet dry (or they’re supposed to); it’s hot: shoes stop our feet from cooking on the pavement; its rough terrain: shoes prevent our feet from getting shredded to bits on a walk through the woods.

But why wear shoes when we run?



According to years of compiled research, shoes do more harm than help when it comes to running long distances. For centuries, the Tarahumara have worn no more than a leather sole strapped to the bottoms of their feet, the Kenyans have gone barefoot, and the Marathon Monks of Japan have secured no more than minimal straw padding under their soles to protect from slicing rocks. The Tarahumara and Kenyans (at one point in time) have thrived on persistence hunting for hundreds of years—the Marathon Monks have run the circum-

ference of the globe at least once over on their journey to enlightenment—and today, we find ourselves cinching on pronation-correcting -max-comfort-extra-

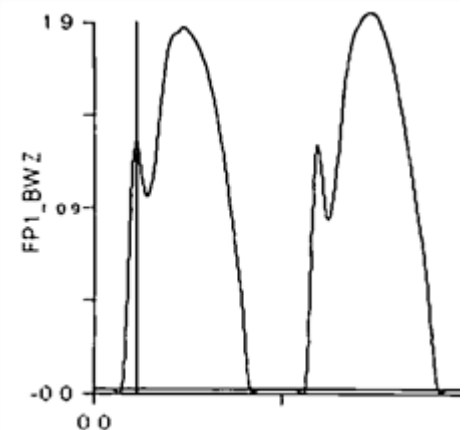
supportive running shoes for a mile jog.

What happened.



Left: In this representative illustration of a runner running in shoes, the red arrow represents the direction of the force the ground applies when the foot lands.

Right: This graph depicts the illustration quantitatively. The sharp jolt at the onset of the peak is the foot's impact with the ground.

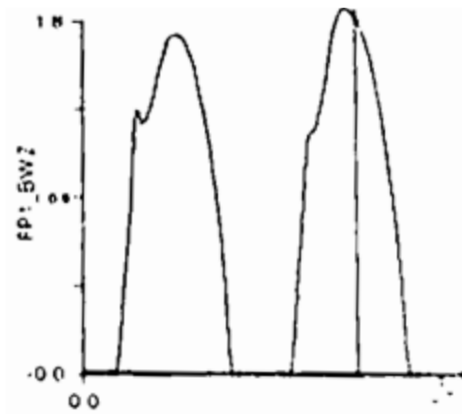


Quite honestly, no one is really sure. Ideas have flown that include the ignorance paid to the physical effects of shoes and the concern granted to the simple want and false sense of need of a supportive device. When wearing shoes, runners heel strike—or land heel first, rolling to mid-foot, and finally push off their toes (MemeSyth). However, this is not the natural gait associated with running form; it is an imposter. A fake. An invention—just like shoes are an invention to modern society. While running in shoes, there is actually a larger impact registered on the legs and feet due to the heel-striking nature of our shoe-laden gait; the ground's reaction force is actually in the backwards direction to the motion of travel (MemeScyth).

This graph also depicts the illustration quantitatively. Notice that the sharp jolt at the onset of the peak has now flattened out—also thanks to ditching the footwear.



Contrarily, when running barefoot or with very little padding, runners tend to land more mid-foot. This results in a less



This representative illustration is the same as the previous—except the runner was barefoot when this data was taken. Compare the direction of the red arrows.

distinct impact peak, and therefore, a much smaller likelihood of injury (MemeScyth).

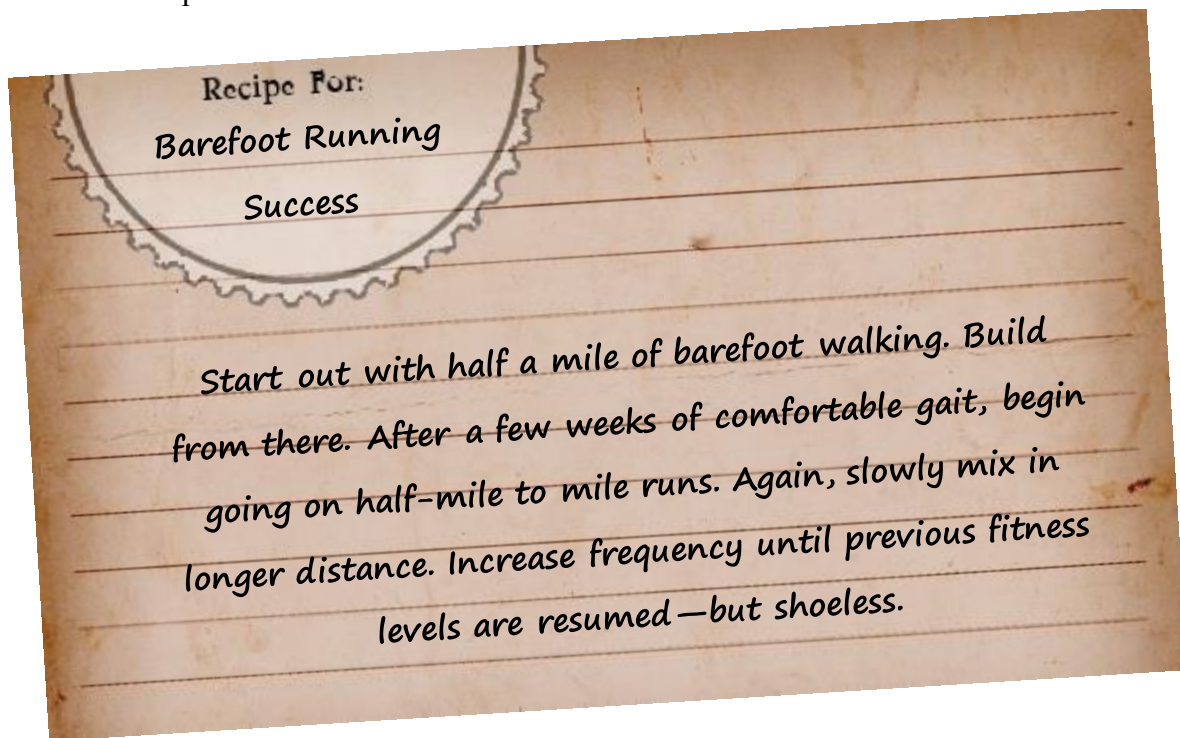
Although shoes are designed for our bodies, our bodies are not designed for shoes.

Help, oh help! Is there anything that can be done to alter this treachery?

Of course. It rhymes with “barefoot running”.

Kendall Brown, Medical Marketing Coordinator at Front Runners, centered in Los Angeles, California, encourages all runners to take up—or at least try—barefoot running, as it “improves your running efficiency...[and] is the natural way of running, encouraging a forefoot strike” (Brown). Although it isn’t for everyone, as benefits might not outweigh the disadvantages, barefoot running *is* easy to adopt. Brown recommends “to ease into it. Slowly start incorporating barefoot running into you’re running routine. Also, begin to strengthen your lower leg in the gym,” as “Barefoot running requires more support from your lower body” (Brown).

Here's the recipe:



For now, although the prevalence of barefoot running seems minimal, not all hope is lost. Its popularity is slowly rising once more. In fact, not all hope is lost for the sport of running in general.

Or is it?

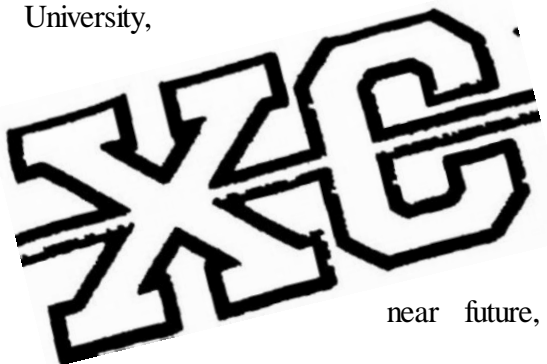


∞ TODAY IS YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW—WILL RUNNING BE POPULAR ON *TODAY'S* TOMORROW?

Running is a sport, and is NOT necessary to life.

This popular motif is circulating the globe over and increasing in status: we as a collectively advanced, global society do not *need* to run for our survival anymore. We simply don't. So what will become of the rhythmic chain of monotonous movements, despised by so many and adored by the select few? What will become of running?

According to Chris Bailey—who coached Cross Country and Track at Illinois State University,



Northern Illinois University, and is currently expanding his coaching career at Antioch Community High School—he predicts the future of distance running to remain steady: no large, foreseeable crazes in the near future, nor any radical plots of overthrow of the sport.

However, compared to when he was running in his high school years, Bailey admits that he believes the interest in distance running has “probably gone down. I think there’re so many [other] fads right now. You have the fit clubs and the P90X and Insanity [workouts] and a lot of other, different types of cardiovascular workouts that people will do—that they actually get into. There’s a bit more rhythm,” and “in the end, [the workouts] do the same thing” (Bailey).

When asked about preserving the valuable interest of running in the public, Bailey had one thing to say: “It all depends on how the kids are brought up.” He continued, “there’re communities like Paletine and Elmhurst...where there’s little kids that have *big* running clubs. From the time they’re little, these kids are getting involved. There’s *hundreds* of kids that are involved. And by the time they get to high school, they’re really successful” (Bailey). He and Beverly repeatedly stressed the importance of upbringing and lifestyle of the younger generation to reserve the running breed’s fragile interest.



So what do you say,
feel like going out for a run yet?





CONCLUDING THE WORK

Overall, I am very happy with my findings. I now find myself much more knowledgeable over the history, uses, implementation, differences, and general evolving nature of running. Today, I find myself pondering further questions of differing potentials regarding running and wonder if this research is the spark of a deeper, all-encompassing future in the studies or love for such.

As the topic of my study goes, the world has moved on and times have changed; the Tarahumara, Kenyans, and Marathon Monks are the few remaining representatives of the dying breed of those still practicing running as it was, unaffected by our fast-paced society, and learned on how to preserve the art as so: through an enforcement of its natural ways of primitive life. However, an underlying expectation of my own was gilded within the stacks of research articles and hours of thought: I wished to expand my own knowledge of running—as it was very self-concerning—to a broader, all-encompassing approach of global aspirations. I am happy to report that with the page requirement of this paper, this goal of mine has not only been met—but surpassed.



∞ THE RESULTANT

Running as it was practiced ages before has evolved into slim existence: its historic implementation is fading; today, due to society's nosey influence, it is merely a sporty remembrance of the necessity it once served. There are several cultures—the Tarahumara, Kenyans, and Marathon Monks—however, who *do* strive to preserve the initial methodology of

running so many have evolved from. These cultures preserve this image out of both necessity and want.

With this, the effects of shoes on society (and of society on shoes) has also aided in obliterating running from today's norm. Barefoot running was plumaged with the invention of the "high-performance" running shoe and struggles to remain intact—to face the test of time.



∞ CONCLUDING THE CONCLUSION

In the end, one fact remains.

“Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up, it knows it must outrun the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning in Africa, a lion wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the slowest gazelle, or it will starve. It doesn't matter whether you're the lion or a gazelle-when the sun comes up, you'd better be running”
(McDougall).



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